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Mother Goose for Grown Folks

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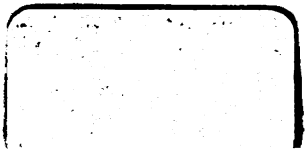

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A CHRISTMAS READING.

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MOTHER GOOSE

FOR

GROWN FOLKS.

A CHRISTMAS READING.

[By A. D. T. Whitney]

ILLUSTRATED BY BILLINGS

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INTRODUCTORY.

Somewhere in that uncertain "long ago,"
Whose dim and vague chronology is all
That elfin tales or nursery fables know,
Rose a rare spirit, — keen, and quick, and quaint, —
Whom by the title, whether fact or feint,
Mythic or real, Mother Goose we call.

Of Momus and Minerva sprang the birth
That gave the laughing oracle to earth:

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A brimming bowl she bears, that, frothing high
With sparkling nonsense, seemeth nonsense all;
Till, the bright, floating syllabub blown by,
Lo, in its ruby splendor doth upshine
The crimson radiance of Olympian wine
By Pallas poured, in Jove's own banquet-hall.

The world was but a baby when she came;
So to her songs it listened, and her name
Grew to a word of power, her voice a spell
With charm to soothe its infant wearying well.
But, in a later and maturer age,
Developed to a dignity more sage,
Having its Shakspeares and its Wordsworths now,

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Its Southeys and its Tennysons, to wear
A halo on the high and lordly brow,
Or poet-laurels in the waving hair;
Its Lowells, Whittiers, Longfellows, to sing
Ballads of beauty, like the notes of spring,
The wise and prudent ones to nursery use
Leave the dear lyrics of old Mother Goose.

Wisdom of babes, — the nursery Shakspeare still, —
Cackles she ever with the same good-will:
Uttering deep counsels in a foolish guise,
That come as warnings, even to the wise;
As when, of old, the martial city slept,
Unconscious of the wily foe that crept
Under the midnight, till the alarm was heard
Out from the mouth of Rome's plebeian bird.

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Full many a rare and subtile thing hath she,
Undreamed of in the world's philosophy:
Toss-balls for children hath she humbly rolled,
That shining jewels secretly enfold;
Sibylline leaves she casteth on the air,
Twisted in fool's-caps, blown unheeded by,
That, in their lines grotesque, albeit, bear
Words of grave truth, and signal prophecy;
And lurking satire, whose sharp lashes hit
A world of follies with their homely wit;
With here and there a roughly uttered hint,
That makes you wonder at the beauty in 't;
As if, along the wayside's dusty edge,
A hot-house flower had blossomed in a hedge.

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So, like brave Layard in old Nineveh,
Among the memories of ancient song,
As curious relics, I would fain bestir;
And gather, if it might be, into strong
And shapely show, some wealth of its
lost lore;
Fragments of Truth's own architecture,
strewed
In forms disjointed, whimsical, and rude,
That yet, to simpler vision, grandly stood
Complete, beneath the golden light of
yore!

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BRAHMIC.

If a great poet think he sings,
Or if the poem think it's sung,
They do but sport the scattered plumes
That Mother Goose aside hath flung.

Far or forgot to me is near:
Shakspeare and Punch are all the same;
The vanished thoughts do reappear,
And shape themselves to fun or fame.

They use my *quills*, and leave me out,
Oblivious that I wear the *wings*;

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Or that a Goose has been about,
When every little gosling sings.

Strong men may strive for grander thought,
But, six times out of every seven,
My old philosophy hath taught
All they can master this side heaven.

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LITTLE BOY BLUE.

"Little boy blue! come blow your horn!
The sheep in the meadow, the cows in the corn!
Where 's little boy blue, that looks after the sheep?
He 's under the hay-mow, fast asleep!"

Of morals in novels, we 've had not a few;
With now and then novel moralities too;
And we 've weekly exhortings from pulpit to pew;
But it strikes me,—and so it may chance to strike you,—
Scarce any are better than "Little Boy Blue."

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For the veteran dame knows her business
right well,
And her quaint admonitions unerringly
tell:
She strings a few odd, careless words in a
jingle,
And the sharp, latent truth fairly makes
your ears tingle.

"Azure-robed Youth!" she cries, "up to
thy post!
And watch, lest thy wealth be all scattered
and lost:
Silly thoughts are astray, beyond call of
the horn,
And passion breaks loose, and gets into the
corn!

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Is this the way Conscience looks after her
sheep?
In the world's soothing shadow, gone sound-
ly asleep?"

Is n't *that*, now, a sermon? No lengthened
vexation
Of heads, and divisions, and argumenta-
tion,
But a straightforward leap to the sure ap-
plication;
And, though many a longer harangue is
forgot,
Of which careful reporters take notes on
the spot,
I think, — as the "Deacon" declared of his
"shay,"

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Put together for lasting for ever and aye,—
A like immortality holding in view,
The old lady's discourse will undoubtedly
"dew"!

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JACK HORNER.

"Little Jack Horner
Sat in a corner
Eating a Christmas Pie:
He put in his thumb,
And pulled out a plum,
And said, 'What a great boy am I!'"

Ah, the world hath many a Horner,
Who, seated in his corner,
Finds a Christmas Pie provided for his thumb:
And cries out with exultation,
When successful exploration
Doth discover the predestinated plum!

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Little Jack outgrows his tire,
And becometh John, Esquire;
And he finds a monstrous pasty ready made,
Stuffed with notes and bonds and bales,
With invoices and sales,
And all the mixed ingredients of Trade.

And again it is his luck
To be just in time to pluck,
By a clever "operation," from the pie
An unexpected "plum";
So he glorifies his thumb,
And says, proudly, "What a mighty man
am I!"

Or perchance, to Science turning,
And with weary labor learning
All the formulas and phrases that oppress
her, —

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For the fruit of others' baking
So a fresh diploma taking,
Comes he forth, a full accredited Professor!

Or he 's not too nice to mix
In the dish of politics;
And the dignity of office he puts on:
And he feels as big again
As a dozen nobler men,
While he writes himself the Honorable John!

Nay, he need not quite despair
Of the Presidential Chair:
The thing is not unlikely to be done;
Since a party puppet now
May wear boldly on its brow
The glory that a Webster never won!

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Not to hint at female Horners,
Who, in their exclusive corners,
Think the world is only made of upper crust;
And in the funny pie
That we call Society,
Their dainty fingers delicately thrust:

Till it sometimes comes to pass,
In the spiced and sugared mass,
One may compass (don't they call it so?)
a *catch*;
And the gratulation given
Seems as if the very heaven
Had outdone itself in making such a match!

O, the world keeps Christmas Day
In a queer, perpetual way;
Shouting always, "What a great, big Boy
am I!"

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Yet how many of the crowd,
Thus vociferating loud,
And its accidental honors lifting high,
Have really, more than Jack,
With all their lucky knack,
Had a finger in the *making* of the Pie?

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BO-PEEP.

"Little Bo-Peep
Has lost her sheep,
And does n't know where to find 'em;
Let 'em alone,
And they 'll come home,
And bring their tails behind 'em."

Hope beckoned Youth, and bade him keep,
On Life's broad plain, his shining sheep,
And while along the sward they came,
He called them over, each by name;
This one was Friendship,—that was Health;
Another Love,—another Wealth;

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One, fat, full-fleeced, was Social Station;
Another, stainless, Reputation;
In truth, a goodly flock of sheep,—
A goodly flock, but hard to keep.

Youth laid him down beside a fountain;
Hope spread his wings to scale a mountain;
And, somehow, Youth fell fast asleep,
And left his crook to tend the sheep:
No wonder, as the legend says,
They took to very crooked ways.

He woke — to hear a distant bleating,—
The faithless quadrupeds were fleeting!

Wealth vanished first, with stealthy tread,
Then Friendship followed — to be fed,—
And foolish Love was after led;

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Fair Fame, — alas! some thievish scamp
Had marked him with his own black stamp!
And he, with Honor at his heels,
Was out of sight across the fields.

Health just hangs doubtful, — distant Hope
Looks backward from the mountain slope, —
And Youth himself — no longer Youth —
Stands face to face with bitter Truth.

Yet let them go! 'T were all in vain
To linger here in faith to find 'em;
Forward! — nor pause to think of pain, —
Till somewhere, on a nobler plain,
A surer Hope shall lead the train
Of joys withheld to come again
With golden fleeces trailed behind 'em!

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SOLOMON GRUNDY.

"Solomon Grundy
Born on Monday,
Christened on Tuesday,
Married on Wednesday,
Sick on Thursday,
Worse on Friday,
Dead on Saturday,
Buried on Sunday:
This was the end
Of Solomon Grundy."

So sings the unpretentious Muse
That guides the quill of Mother Goose,
And in one week of mortal strife
Presents the epitome of Life:

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But down sits Billy Shakspeare next,
And, coolly taking up the text,
His thought pursues the trail of mine,
And, lo! the "Seven Ages" shine!
O world! O critics! *can't* you see
How Shakspeare plagiarizes me?

And other bards will after come,
To echo in a later age,
"He lived,—he died: behold the sum,
The abstract of the historian's page";—
Yet once for all the thing was done,
Complete in Grundy's pilgrimage.

For not a child upon the knee
But hath the moral learned of me;
And measured, in a seven days' span,
The whole experience of man.

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BOWLS.

"Three wise men of Gotham
Went to sea in a bowl:
If the bowl had been stronger,
My song had been longer."

MYSTERIOUSLY suggestive! A vague hint,
Yet a rare touch of most effective art,
That of the bowl, and all the voyagers in 't,
Tells nothing, save the fact that they did start.
There ending suddenly, with subtle craft,
The story stands, — as 't were a broken shaft, —

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More eloquent in mute signification,
Than lengthened detail, or precise relation.
So perfect in its very non-achieving,
That, of a truth, I cannot help believing
A rash attempt at paraphrasing it
May prove a blunder, rather than a hit.

Still, I must wish the venerable soul
Had been explicit as regards the *bowl*.
Was it, perhaps, a railroad speculation?
Or a big ship to carry all creation,
That, by some kink of its machinery,
Failed, in the end, to carry even three?
Or other fond, erroneous calculation
Of splendid schemes that died disastrously?

It must have been of Gotham manufacture;
Though strangely weak, and liable to fracture.

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Yet — pause a moment — strangely, did I say?
Scarcely, since, after all, it was but clay; —
The stuff Hope takes to build her brittle boat,
And therein sets the wisest men afloat.
Truly, a bark would need be somewhat stronger,
To make the halting history much longer.

Doubtless, the good Dame did but generalize, —
Took a broad glance at human enterprise,
And earthly expectation, and so drew,
In pithy lines, a parable most true, —
Kindly to warn us ere we sail away,
With life's great venture, in an ark of clay,

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Where shivered fragments all around betoken,
How even the "golden bowl" at last lies broken!

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CRADLED IN GREEN.

"Rockaby, baby,
Your cradle is green;
Father's a nobleman,
Mother's a queen;
And Betty's a lady,
And wears a gold ring,
And Johnny's a drummer,
And drums for the king!"

O GOLDEN gift of childhood!
That, with its kingly touch,
Transforms to more than royalty
The thing it loveth much!

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O second sight, bestowed alone
Upon the baby seer,
That the glory held in Heaven's reserve
Discerneth even here!

Though he be the humblest craftsman,
No silk nor ermine piled
Could make the father seem a whit
More noble to the child;
And the mother,—ah, what queenlier crown
Could rest upon her brow,
Than the fair and gentle dignity
It weareth to him now?

E'en the gilded ring that Michael
For a penny fairing bought,
Is the seal of Betty's ladyhood
To his untutored thought;

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And the darling drum about his neck,—
His very newest toy,—
A bandsman unto Majesty
Hath straightway made the boy!

O golden gift of childhood!
If the talisman might last,
How the dull Present still should gleam
With the glory of the Past!
But the things of earth about us
Fade and dwindle as we go,
And the long perspective of our life
Is truth, and not a show!

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"SIMILIA SIMILIBUS."

"There was a man in our town,
And he was wondrous wise:
He jumped into a bramble-bush,
And scratched out both his eyes.
But when he saw his eyes were out,
With all his might and main
He jumped into another bush,
And scratched them in again!"

Old Dr. Hahnemann read the tale,
(And he was wondrous wise,)
Of the man who, in the bramble-bush,
Had scratched out both his eyes.

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And the fancy tickled mightily
His misty German brain,
That, by jumping in another bush,
He got them back again.

So he called it "homo-hop-athy"·
And soon it came about,
That a curious crowd among the thorns
Was hopping in and out.
Yet, disguise it by the longest name
They may, it is no use;
For the world knows the discovery
Was made by Mother Goose!

And not alone in medicine
Doth the theory hold good:
In Life and in Philosophy,
The maxim still hath stood:

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A morsel more of anything,
When one has got enough,
And Nature's energy disowns
The whole unkindly stuff.

A second negative affirms;
And two magnetic poles
Of charge identical, repèl,—
As sameness sunders souls.
Touched with a first, fresh suffering,
All solace is despised;
But gathered sorrows grow serene,
And grief is neutralized.

And he who, in the world's *mêlée*,
Hath chanced the worse to catch,
May mend the matter, if he come
Back, boldly, to the scratch;

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Minding the lesson he received
In boyhood, from his mother,
Whose cheery word, for many a bump,
Was, Up and take another!

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HOBBY-HORSES.

"I had a little pony,
His name was Dapple Gray:
I lent him to a lady
To ride a mile away.
She whipped him,
She lashed him,
She rode him through the mire;
I would n't lend my pony now,
For all the lady's hire."

Our hobbies, of whatever sort
They be, mine honest friend,
Of fancy, enterprise, or thought,
'T is hardly wise to lend.

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Some fair imagination, shrined
In form poetic, maybe,
You fondly trusted to the World,—
That most capricious Lady.

Or a high, romantic theory,
Magnificently planned,
In flush of eager confidence
You bade her take in hand.

But she whipped it, and she lashed it,
And bespattered it with mire,
Till your very soul felt stained within,
And scourged with stripes of fire.

Yet take this thought, and hold it fast,
Ye Martyrs of To-day!
That same great World, with all its scorn,
You've lifted on its way!

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MISSIONS.

"Hogs in the garden,—
Catch 'em, Towser!
Cows in the cornfield,—
Run, boys, run!
Fire on the mountains,—
Run, boys, run boys!
Cats in the cream-pot,—
Run, girls, run!"

I DON'T stand up for Woman's Right;
Not I,—no, no!
The real lionesses fight,—
I let it go.

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Yet, somehow, as I catch the call
Of the world's voice,
That speaks a summons unto all
Its girls and boys;

In such strange contrast still it rings
As church-bells' bome
To the pert sound of tinkling things
One hears at home;
And wakes an impulse, not germane
Perhaps, to woman,
Yet with a thrill that makes it plain
'T is truly human;—

A sudden tingle at the springs
Of noble feeling,
The spirit-power for valiant things
Clearly revealing.

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But Eden's curse doth daily deal
Its certain dole,—
And the old grasp upon the heel
Holds back the soul!

So, when some rousing deed 's to do,
To save a nation,
Or, on the mountains, to subdue
A conflagration,
Woman! the work is not for you;
Mind your vocation!
Out from the cream-pot comes a mew
Of tribulation!

Meekly the world's great exploits leave
Unto your betters;
So bear the punishment of Eve,
Spirit in fetters!

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Only, the hidden fires will glow,
And, now and then,
A beacon blazeth out below
That startles men!

Some Joan, through battle-field to stake,
Danger embracing;
Some Florence, for sweet mercy's sake
Pestilence facing;
Whose holy valor vindicates
The royal birth
That, for its crowning, only waits
The end of earth;
And, haply, when we all stand freed,
In strength immortal,
Such virgin-lamps the host shall lead
Through heaven's portal!

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GOING BACK TO OUR MUTTONS.

"There was an old man of Tobago,
Who lived on rice, gruel, and sago,
Till, much to his bliss,
His physician said this:
To a leg, sir, of mutton, you may go.
He set a monkey to baste the mutton,
And ten pounds of butter he put on."

"CHAIN up a child, and away he will go";
I have heard of the proverb interpreted so;
The spendthrift is son to the miser,—and still,
When the Devil would work his most pitiless will,

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He sends forth the seven, for such embassies kept,
To the house that is empty and garnished and swept:
For poor human nature a pendulum seems,
That must constantly vibrate between two extremes.

The closer the arrow is drawn to the bow,
Once slipped from the string, all the further 't will go:
Let a panic arise in the world of finance,
And the mad flight of Fashion be checked by the chance,
It certainly seems a most wonderful thing,
When the ropes are let go again, how it will swing!

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And even the decent observance of Lent,
Stirs sometimes a doubt how the time has been spent,
When Easter brings out the new bonnets and gowns,
And a flood of gay colors o'erflows in the towns.

So in all things the feast doth still follow the fast,
And the force of the contrast gives zest to the last;
And until he is tried, no frail mortal can tell,
The inch being offered, he won't take the ell.
We are righteously shocked at the follies of fashion;

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Nay, standing outside, may get quite in a passion
At the prodigal flourishes other folks put on:
But many good people this side of Tobago,
If respited once from their diet of sago,
Would outdo the monkey in basting the mutton!

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GOING TO DOVER.

"Leg over leg
As the dog went to Dover;
When he came to a stile,
Jump he went over."

PERHAPS you would n't see it here,
But, to my fancy, 't is quite clear
That Mother Goose just meant to show
How the dog Patience on doth go:
With steadfast nozzle, pointing low,—
Leg over leg, however slow,—
And labored breath, but naught complaining,
Still, at each footstep, somewhat gaining,—

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Quietly plodding, mile on mile,
And gathering for a nervous bound
At every interposing stile,—
So traversing the tedious ground,
Till all, at length, he measures over,
And walks, a victor, into Dover.

And, verily, no other way
Doth human progress win the day;
Step after step,—and o'er and o'er,—
Each seeming like the one before,
So that 't is only once a while,—
When sudden Genius springs the stile
That marks a section of the plain,
Beyond whose bound fresh fields again
Their widening stretch untrodden sweep,—
The world looks round to see the leap.

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Pale Science, in her laboratory,
Works on with crucible and wire
Unnoticed, till an instant glory
Crowns some high issue, as with fire,
And men, with wondering eyes awide,
Gauge great Invention's giant stride.

No age, no race, no single soul,
By lofty tumbling gains the goal.
The steady pace it keeps between,—
The little points it makes unseen,—
By these, achieved in gathering might,
It moveth on, and out of sight,
And wins, through all that's overpast,
The city of its hopes at last.

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RAGS AND ROBES.

"Hark, hark!
The dogs do bark;
Beggars are coming to town:
Some in rags,
Some in tags,
And some in velvet gowns!"

Coming, coming always!
Crowding into earth;
Seizing on this human life,
Beggars from the birth.

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Some in patent penury;
Some, alas! in shame;
And some in fading velvet
Of hereditary fame;

But all in deep, appeaseless want,
As mendicants to live;
And go beseeching through the world,
For what the world may give.

Beggars, beggars, all of us!
Expectants from our youth:
With hands outstretched, and asking alms
Of Hope and Love and Truth.

Nor, verily, doth he escape
Who, wrapt in cold contempt,
Denies alike to give or take,
And dreams himself exempt;

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Who never, in appeal to man,
Nor in a prayer to Heaven,
Will own that aught he doth desire,
Or ask that aught be given.

Whose human heart a stoic pride
Folds as a velvet pall;
Yet hides a meagreness within,
Worse beggary than all!

Coming, coming always!
And the bluff Apostle waits
As the throng pours upward from the earth
To Heaven's eternal gates.

In shreds of torn affection,
In passion-rended rags;

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While scarcely at the portal
The great procession flags;

For the pillared doors of glory
On their hinges hang awide;
Where each asking soul may enter,
And at last be satisfied!

But a cold, calm shade arriveth,
In self-complacent trim,—
And Peter riseth up to see
Especially to him.

"Good morrow, saint! I 'm going in
To take a stroll, you know;
Not that *I want* for anything,—
But just to see the show!"

"Hold!" thunders out the warden,
"Be pleased to pause a bit!

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For seats celestial, let me say,
You 're not apparelled fit:
Yonder 's the brazen door that leads
Spectators to the pit!

Whatever may be thought on earth,
We 've other rules in heaven;
And only poverty confessed
Finds free admittance given!"

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BLACKBIRDS.

"Sing a song o' sixpence, a pocket full of rye;
Four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie:
When the pie was opened, they all began to sing,
And was n't this a dainty dish to set before the king?
The king was in his counting-house, counting out his money;
The queen was in the parlor, eating bread and honey;
The maid was in the garden, hanging out the clothes,
And along came a blackbird, and nipt off her nose!"

It does n't take a conjurer to see
The sort of curious pasty this might be;
A flock of flying rumors, caught alive,
And housed, like swarming bees within a hive,—

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Instead of what were far more wisely done,
Having their worthless necks wrung, every one;—
And so a dish of dainty gossip making,
Smooth covered with a show of secrecy,
That one but takes the pleasant pains of breaking,
And out the wide-mouthed knaves pop, eagerly.

Blackbirds, indeed! Each chattering *on-dit*
Comes forth, full feathered, black as black can be;
With quivering throats, all tremulous to sing,
And please, forsooth, some little social king;

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Whose reign may last as long as he is able
To call his court around a dinner-table.

But, mark the sequel! When the laugh is over,
Think not to get the varlets under cover:
The crust once broken, you may seek in vain
To catch the birds, or coax them in again;
Mrs. Pandora's famous box, I wis,
Was nothing worse than such a pie as this:
And so, some pleasant morning, — when, down town,
The king is busy with his bags of money,
Leaving at home the queenly Mrs. Brown
Safe at her breakfast of fair bread and honey, —
Some quiet, harmless soul, who never knows
Of any matters, save the plain pursuing

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Her daily round, — the hanging out of clothes
Or other lawful work she may be doing, —
Finds, by the sudden nipping of her nose,
What sort of mischief is about her brewing!

Not that, indeed, there 's anything to hinder
The thieves from flying though the parlor-window;
For never yet could sentinel or warden
Keep scandals wholly to the kitchen garden.

When, therefore, as not seldom it may be,
Even in the soberest community,
Strange revelations somehow get about, —
Like a mysterious cholera breaking out

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Sudden, as Egypt's blains 'neath Aaron's rod,
Contagious by a whisper or a nod,—
When daily papers teem with many a hint
That daubs them darker even than their print;
When it would seem, in short, the very D——
Had let his little imps out on a spree;
Conclude, beyond a reasonable doubt,
Although, perhaps, you fail to trace it out,
Such plagues spring not unbidden from the ground,
And, if the thing were sifted, 't would be found
Somebody 's sown a pocket full of rye,
Or been regaling on a blackbird pie!

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BANBURY CROSS.

"Ride a fine horse
To Banbury Cross,
To see a young woman
Jump on a white horse.
Rings on her fingers,
And bells on her toes,
And she shall have music
Wherever she goes."

PROPHETIC Dame! What hadst thou in thy view?
A modern wedding in Fifth Avenue?

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Where,—like the goddess of a heathen
shrine,
With offerings heaped in such a glittering
show
As must have emptied a Peruvian mine,
And would suggest, but that we better
know,
Marriage must be a bitter thing indeed,
And, like the Prophet of the Eastern tale,
Must wear a very ugly face, to need
Such careful shrouding in the silver
veil,—
Her bridal pomp, as a white palfrey, mount-
ing,
Caparisoned at cost beyond all counting,
With diamond-jewelled fingers, and the
toes
Ditto, for all that anybody knows,

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The smiling damsel goeth to the Banns?
(Why add the "bury," or suggest the
"cross,"
As if such brilliant ringing of the hands
Preluded aught of trial or of loss?)

Shall not Life's golden bells still tinkle
sweet,
And merry music make about her feet?
Shall not the silver sheen around her spread,
A lasting light along her pathway shed?

No mocking satire, surely, hides a sting,
Nor bitter irony a truth foreshows,
In the gay chant the cheery dame doth
sing,—
"She shall have music wheresoe'er she
goes"?

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She shall have music! Shall she sit apart,
And let the folly-chimes outvoice the tone
That comes up wailing to the listening heart,
From the great world, where misery maketh moan?
Ah, Mother Goose! if such the tale it tells,
Sing us no more your rhyme of rings and bells!

But may not—'t were a rare device indeed!—
The wondrous oracle in both ways read?
And call up, as a fair beatitude,
The gracious vision of true womanhood,
That with pure purpose, and a gentle might,
Upheld and borne, as by the steed of white,

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Pledged with her golden ring, goes nobly
forth
To trace her path of joy along the earth,—
And, as she moves, makes music, silver-shod
"With preparation of the peace" of God,
That holds the key-note of celestial cheer,
And hangs heaven's echoes round her foot-
steps here?

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THE MAD HORSE.

"There was a mad man,
And he had a mad wife,
And the children were mad beside;
So on a mad horse
They all of them got,
And madly away did ride."

Sagacious Goose! Fresh wonders yet!
What spell had power to help you get
Those seven-leagued spectacles, that see
Down to the nineteenth century?

"The mad world, and his madder wife!"
That, in your earlier time of life,—

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Though quite demented now, 't is plain, —
Were sober, grave, and almost sane!

And all the tribes, a motley brood
Sprung into being since the flood,
With their hereditary bent
To cerebral bewilderment!

If some old ghost, precise and slow,
Who died a hundred years ago, —
Always supposing he himself
Has lain, meanwhile, upon the shelf, —

Things as they are might only see,
Surely his inference would be
A simultaneous bursting out
Of lunacy the earth about.

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"The world is mad; his wife is mad;
The rising generation 's madder";
And when a charter can be had,
Up to the moon they 'll build a ladder!

They caught a horse awhile ago, —
They called him Steam, — but he was slow;
After the lightning then they ran,
Caught him, — and now they drive the span!

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THE BIG SHOE.

"There was an old woman
Who lived in a shoe;
She had so many children
She did n't know what to do:
To some she gave broth,
And to some she gave bread,
And some she whipped soundly,
And sent them to bed."

Do you find out the likeness?
A portly old Dame,—
The mother of millions,—
Britannia by name:

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And — howe'er it may strike you
In reading the song —
Not stinted in space.
For bestowing the throng;
Since the Sun can himself
Hardly manage to go,
In a day and a night,
From the heel to the toe.

On the arch of the instep
She builds up her throne,
And, with seas rolling under,
She sits there alone;
With her heel at the foot
Of the Himmalehs planted,
And her toe in the icebergs,
Unchilled and undaunted.

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Yet though justly of all
Her fine family proud,
'T is no light undertaking
To rule such a crowd;
Not to mention the trouble
Of seeing them fed,
And dispensing with justice
The broth and the bread.
Some will seize upon one,—
Some are left with the other,—
And so the whole household
Gets into a pother.
But the rigid old Dame
Has a summary way
Of her own, when she finds
There is mischief to pay.
She just takes up the rod,
As she lays down the spoon,

Digitized by Google

And makes their rebellious backs
Tingle right soon:
Then she bids them, while yet
The sore smarting they feel,
To lie down, and go to sleep,
Under her heel!

Only once was she posed,—
When the little boy Sam,
Who had always before
Been as meek as a lamb,
Refused to take tea,
As his mother had bid,
And returned saucy answers
Because he was chid.

Not content even then,
He cut loose from the throne,

Digitized by Google

And set about making
A shoe of his own;
Which succeeded so well,
And was filled up so fast,
That the world, in amazement,
Confessed, at the last,—
Looking on at the work
With a gasp and a stare,—
That 't was hard to tell which
Would be best of the pair.

Side by side they are standing
Together to-day;
Side by side may they keep
Their strong foothold for aye:
And beneath the broad sea,
Whose blue depths intervene,
May the finishing string
Lie unbroken between!

Digitized by Google

VICTUALS AND DRINK.

"There once was a woman,
And what do you think?
She lived upon nothing
But victuals and drink.
Victuals and drink
Were the chief of her diet,
And yet this poor woman
Scarce ever was quiet."

And were you so foolish
As really to think
That all she could want
Was her victuals and drink?

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And that while she was furnished
With that sort of diet,
Her feeling and fancy
Would starve, and be quiet?

Mother Goose knew far better;
But thought it sufficient
To give a mere hint
That the fare was deficient;
For I do not believe
She could ever have meant
To imply there was reason
For being content.

Yet the mass of mankind
Is uncommonly slow
To acknowledge the fact
It behooves them to know;

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Or to learn that a woman
Is not like a mouse,
Needing nothing but cheese,
And the walls of a house.

But just take a man,—
Shut him up for a day;
Get his hat and his cane,—
Put them snugly away;
Give him stockings to mend,
And three sumptuous meals;—
And then ask him, at night,
If you dare, how he feels!
Do you think he will quietly
Stick to the stocking,
While you read the news,
And "don't care about talking"?

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O, many a woman
  Goes starving, I ween,
Who lives in a palace,
  And fares like a queen;
Till the famishing heart,
  And the feverish brain,
Have spelled out to life's end
  The long lesson of pain.

Yet, stay! To my mind
  An uneasy suggestion
Comes up, that there may be
  Two sides to the question.
That, while here and there proving
  Inflicted privation,
The verdict must often be
  "Wilful starvation."

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Since there *are* men and women
Would force one to think
They *choose* to live only
On victuals and drink.

O restless, and craving,
Unsatisfied hearts,
Whence never the vulture
Of hunger departs!
How long on the husks
Of your life will ye feed,
Ignoring the soul,
And her famishing need?

Bethink you, when lulled
In your shallow content,
'T was to Lazarus only
The angels were sent;

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And 't is he to whose lips
But earth's ashes are given,
For whom the full banquet
Is gathered in heaven!

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COBWEBS AND BROOMS.

"There was an old woman
Tossed up in a blanket,
Seventeen times as high as the moon;
What she did there
I cannot tell you,
But in her hand she carried a broom.
Old woman, old woman,
Old woman, said I,
O whither, O whither, O whither so high?
To sweep the cobwebs
Off the sky,
And I'll be back again, by and by."

MIND you, she wore no *wings*,
That she might truly *soar*; no time was lost

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In growing such unnecessary things;
But blindly, in a blanket, she was *tost!*

Spasmodically, too!
'T was not enough that she should reach the moon;
But seventeen times the distance she must do,
Lest, peradventure, she get back too soon.

That emblematic broom!
Besom of mad Reform, uplifted high,
That, to reach cobwebs, would precipitate doom,
And sweep down thunderbolts from out the sky!

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Doubtless, no rubbish lay
About her door, — no work was there to do, —
That through the astonished aisles of Night and Day,
She took her valorous flight in quest of new!

Lo! at her little broom
The great stars laugh, as on their wheels of fire
They go, dispersing the eternal gloom,
And shake Time's dust from off each blazing tire!

Digitized by Google

BLACK SPIDERS.

"Little Miss Muffet
Sat on a tuffet,
Eating curds and whey:
There came a black spider,
And sat down beside her,
And frightened Miss Muffet away."

To all mortal blisses,
From comfits to kisses,
There 's sure to be something by way of alloy;
Each new expectation
Brings fresh aggravation,
And a doubtful amalgam 's the best of our joy.

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You may sit on your tuffet;
Yes, — cushion and stuff it;
And provide what you please, if you don't
fancy whey;
But before you can eat it,
There'll be — I repeat it —
Some sort of black spider to come in the
way.

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DAFFY-DOWN-DILLY.

"Daffy-down-dilly
Is new come to town,
With a petticoat green,
And a bright yellow gown,
And her little white blossoms
Are peeping around."

Now don't you call this
A most exquisite thing?
Don't it give you a thrill
With the thought of the spring,
Such as once, in your childhood,
You felt, when you found

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The first yellow buttercups
Spangling the ground?

When the lilac was fresh
With its glory of leaves,
And the swallows came fluttering
Under the eaves?
When the bluebird flashed by
Like a magical thing,
And you looked for a fairy
Astride of his wing?

When the clear, running water,
Like tinkling of bells,
Bore along the bare roadside
A song of the dells,—
And the mornings were fresh
With unfailing delight,

Digitized by Google

While the sweet summer hush
Always came with the night?

O daffy-down-dilly,
With robings of gold!
As our hearts every year
To your coming unfold,
And sweet memories stir
Through the hardening mould,
We feel how earth's blossomings
Surely are given
To keep the soul fresh
For the spring-time of heaven!

Digitized by Google

BAA, BAA, BLACK SHEEP!

"Baa, baa, black sheep!
Have you any wool?
Yes, sir, — no, sir, —
Three bags full.
One for my master,
One for my dame,
And one for the little boy
That lives in the lane."

'T is the same question as of old;
And still the doubter saith,
"Can any good be made to come
From out of Nazareth?"

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No sheep so black in all the flock,—
No human heart so bare,—
But hath some warm and generous stock
Of kindliness to share.

It may be treasured secretly
For dear ones at the hearth;
Or be bestowed by stealth along
The by-ways of the earth;—

And though no searching eye may see,
Nor busy tongue may tell,
Perchance, where largest love is laid,
The Master knoweth well!

Digitized by Google

THE TWISTER.

"A twister, in twisting, would twist him a twist,
And, twisting his twists, seven twists he doth twist:
If one twist, in twisting, untwist from the twist,
The twist, untwisting, untwists the twist."

A RAVELLED rainbow overhead
Lets down to life its varying thread:
Love's blue, — Joy's gold, — and, fair between,
Hope's shifting light of emerald green;
With, either side, in deep relief,
A crimson Pain, — a violet Grief.

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Wouldst thou, amid their gleaming hues,
Clutch after those, and these refuse?
Believe,—as thy beseeching eyes
Follow their lines, and sound the skies,—
There, where the fadeless glories shine,
An unseen angel twists the twine.

And be thou sure, what tint soe'er
The broken rays beneath may wear,
It needs them all, that, broad and white,
God's love may weave the perfect light!

Digitized by Google

FANTASY.

"I have a little sister,
They call her peep, peep;
She wades through the water,
Deep, deep, deep;
She climbs up the mountains,
High, high, high;
My poor little sister,
She has but one eye!"

Rough Common Sense doth here confess
Her kinship to Imagination;
Betraying also, I should guess,
Some little pride in the relation.

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For even while vexed, and puzzled too,
By the vagaries of the latter,—
Fearful what next the child may do,—
She looks with loving wonder at her.

Plain Sense keeps ever to the road
That 's beaten down and daily trod;
While Fancy fords the rivers wide,
And scrambles up the mountain-side:
By which exploits she 's always getting
Either a tumble or a wetting.

While simple Sense looks straight before,
Fancy "peeps" further, and sees more;
And yet, if left to walk alone,
May chance, like most long-sighted people,
To trip her foot against a stone
While gazing at a distant steeple.

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Nay, worse! with all her grace erratic,
And feats aerial and aquatic,
Her flights sublime, and moods ecstatic,
She of the vision wild and high
Hath but a solitary eye!
And, — not to quote the Scripture, which
Forebodes the falling in the ditch, —
Doubtless by following such a guide
Blindly, in all her wanderings wide,
The world, at best, would get o' one side.

What then? To rid us of our doubt
Is there no other thing to do
But we must turn poor Fancy out,
And only downright Fact pursue?

Ah, see you not, bewildered man!
The heavenly beauty of the plan?

Digitized by Google

'T was so ordained, in counsels high,
To give to sweet Imagination
A single deep and glorious eye;
But then 't was meant, in compensation,
That Common Sense, with optics keen,—
As maid of honor to a queen,—
On her blind side should always stay,
And keep her in the middle way.

Digitized by Google

JINGLING AND JANGLING.

"Little Jack Jingle
Used to live single.
But when he got tired
Of that kind of life,
He left off being single,
And lived with his wife."

Your period 's pointed, most excellent Mother!
Pray what did he do when he tired of the other?
For a man so deplorably prone to ennui
But a queer sort of husband is likely to be.

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The fatigue might recur,—and, in case it
should be so,
Why not take a wife on a limited lease, O?
Grant the privilege, pray, to his idiosyn-
crasy,—
Some natures won't bear to be too closely
pinned, you see,—
And, at worst, the poor Benedict might
advertise,
When weary, at length, of the light of his
eyes,—
Or failing to find her, it may be, in salt,—
"Disposed of, indeed, for no manner of
fault,"
(To borrow a figure of speech from the
mart,)
"But because the late owner has taken a
start!"

Digitized by Google

I believe once before you have cautiously
said
Something quite as concise on this delicate
head,
When distantly hinting at "needles and
pins,"
And that "when a man marries, his trouble
begins";
But I don't recollect that you ever pretend
To prophesy anything as to the *end*.

Unless we may learn it of Peter, — the
bumpkin,
Renowned for naught else but his eating
of pumpkin;
Whose wife — I don't see how he happened
to get her —
Had a taste, very likely, for things that
were better:

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Since, fearing to lose her, at last it befell
He bethought him of shutting her up in a shell;
By which brilliant contrivance she *kept* very well!
What he did with her next, the tradition don't say,
But she seems to be somehow got out of the way,
For the ill-fated Peter was wedded once more,
To find his bewilderment worse than before;
If the first for her spouse had but small predilection,
Now 't was his turn, alas! to fall short in affection.

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And how do you think that he conquered
the evil?
Why, simply by *lifting himself to her level;*
By leaving his pumpkins, and learning to
spell,
He came, saith the story, to love her right
well;
And the mythical memoir its moral con-
trives
For the lasting instruction of husbands
and wives.

Digitized by Google

THE OLD WOMAN OF SURREY.

"There was an old woman in Surrey,
Who was morn, noon, and night in a hurry;
Called her husband a fool,
Drove the children to school,
The worrying old woman of Surrey."

'T was an ancient earldom over the sea,
And it must be now as it used to be;
Yet the sketch is of one I have known before,—
The very old woman that lives next door.

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One thing is unquestionable, — she 's
"smart," —
As they say of an apple that 's rather tart;
For her nearest friends, I think, would
allow her
To be, at her best, but a "pleasant sour."

There 's a certain electrical atmosphere
That you feel beforehand, when she 's near:
And — unless you 've a wonderful deal of
pluck —
A shrinking fear that you might be
"struck."

She moves with such a bustle and rush. —
Such an elemental stir and crush,
As makes the branches bend and fall
In the breeze that blows up a thunder-squall.

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And yet, it is only her endless "hurry";
She 's not so bad if she would n't "worry,"
And, for all the worlds that she has to make,
If the six days' time she 'd only take.

You may talk about Surrey, or Devon, or Kent,
But I doubt if a special location was meant;
It may sound severe, — but it seems to me
That a "representative" woman was she;

And that here and there you may chance to trace
Some specimens extant of the race:
For a slip of the stock, as I 've a notion,
Somehow "in the Mayflower" crossed the ocean.

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PICKLE PEPPERS.

"Peter Piper picked a peck of pickle peppers;
And a peck of pickle peppers Peter Piper picked;
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickle peppers
Where's the peck of pickle peppers Peter Piper picked?"

Poor Peter toiled his life away,
That afterward the world might say
"Where is the peck of peppers he
Did gather so industriously?"
The peppers are embalmed in metre, —
But who, alas! inquires for Peter?

Digitized by Google

In sun or storm, by night and day,
Scant time for sleep, and none for play,
Still the poor fool did nothing reck,
If only he might pick his peck:
And what result from all hath sprung,
But just to bite somebody's tongue?
Or, — Lady Fortune playing fickle, —
Get some one in a precious pickle?

Digitized by Google

HUMPTY DUMPTY.

"Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall:
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall:
Not all the king's horses nor all the king's men
Could set Humpty Dumpty up again."

FULL many a project that never was hatched
Falls down, and gets shattered beyond being patched;
And luckily, too! for if all came to chickens,
Then things without feathers might go to the dickens.

Digitized by Google

If each restless unit that moves among men
Might climb to a place with the privileged
"ten,"
Pray tell us where all the commotion would
stop!
Must the whole pan of milk, forsooth, rise
to the top?

If always the statesman attained to his hopes,
And grasped the great helm, who would
stand by the ropes?
Or if all dainty fingers their duties might
choose,
Who would wash up the dishes, and polish
the shoes?

Suppose every aspirant writing a book
Contrived to get published, by hook or by
crook;

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Geologists then of a later creation
Would be startled, I fancy, to find a formation
Proving how the poor world did most wofully sink
Beneath mountains of paper, and oceans of ink!

Or even suppose all the women were married;
By whom would superfluous babies be carried?
Where would be the good aunts that should knit all the stockings?
Or nurses, to do up the singings and rockings?
Wise spinsters, to lay down their wonderful rules,

Digitized by Google

And with theories rare to enlighten the fools,—
Or to look after orphans, and primary schools?

No! Failure's a part of the infinite plan;
Who finds that he can't, must give way to who can;
And as one and another drops out of the race,
Each stumbles at last to his suitable place.

So the great scheme works on,—though, like eggs from the wall,
Little single designs to such ruin may fall,
That not all the world's might, of its horses or men,
Could set their crushed hopes at the summit again.

Digitized by Google

SUNDAY AND MONDAY.

"As Tommy Snooks and Bessy Brooks
Were walking out one Sunday,
Says Tommy Snooks to Bessy Brooks,
To-morrow will be Monday."

No doubt you are smiling at such a remark,
And thinking poor Snooks but a pitiful spark;
But the words have a meaning, worth looking for, too,
As I'll presently try and demonstrate for you.

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'T was a pity, indeed, in that moment of leisure,
To dampen poor Bessy's hebdomadal pleasure,
Suggesting that close on the beautiful Sunday
Must come all the common-place horrors of Monday;

That he to his toiling, and she to her tub,
Must turn, and take up with another week's rub;
Yet a truth for us all, since the shade of the real
Follows fast on the track of each sunny ideal.

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Now and then we may pause on Life's
pleasant oases;
But between lie the desert's grim, desolate
spaces;
And our feet, with all patience, must trav-
erse them still,
Reaching forward to blessing, through
bearing of ill.

Yet for Snooks and his Bessy,—for me
and for you,—
Comes a Saturday night when the wage
will be due;
And we'll say to each other, in ecstasy,
one day,
"To-morrow—the endless to-morrow—is
Sunday!"

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CONCLUSION.

Doubtless I might go on to quote,
With added paraphrase and note,
Enough of rhymes to fill a scroll,
That, bundled up, should be a roll
As bulky as a broad-brimmed hat;
But "verbum sapienti sat!"
Suffice it to have struck the vein,
And shown some specimens of ore;
If any seek for further gain,
The mine still holds abundance more.
A mental pickaxe and a biggin
Are all you need to go to diggin'.

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For, as the Swedish seer contends,
All things comprise an inner sense;
There 's nothing we can write or say,
In howsoever simple way,
But seems a body, built to hide
The soul, that straightway is supplied;
And many a fool, and prophet too,
Hath spoken wiser than he knew.

One parting word, and I am gone:
If I 've prevailed to make you see
These things as they appear to me,
Then have I proved my Goose a Swan;
And I, descended of her line,
And bearing yet the ancient name,
May, for this ancestress of mine,
Claim place upon the page of fame; —
That not a bard of Saxon tongue
More true to nature ever sung;

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More surely soothed, more deeply taught,
Or passing fact more keenly caught;
And that — exalted side by side
With him of Avon, in the pride
And love of millions — we should lay
The tribute at her feet to-day
That owns her, in this latter age,
Goose, truly, — but, in savor, Sage!

THE END.

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